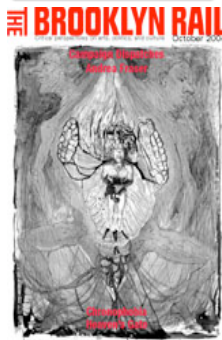


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The Wedding Project

by Shane McAdams

65 Hope Street Gallery

Unless you've been avoiding television for the past twenty years, you've probably seen more fake weddings than real ones. They're everywhere, virtually, and virtually everywhere. But fake weddings have no more in common with real weddings than the Wild West has with rural New Mexico; they are merely commercials for a lifestyle that hardly exists, but remains for sale. These are the sentiments underpinning The Wedding

Project, a group show that, according to curators Jennifer S. Musawwir and Melissa Potter, investigates "the inescapable and monumental construction of 'the wedding' in popular culture."

The show opens with a series of contour drawings by Jessica Doyle along the gallery's near wall that we eventually discover are abstracted from either bridal magazines or pornography. Which are which is far more ambiguous than Doyle's pointed implication about the basic ritualistic similarities between each subculture.

Nearby, rising from a tailor's platform in the center of the gallery is an impressive sculpture by Jennifer Yazon. The rigid cylinder of a vacated bridal gown is offset by a thin gold chain anchoring it to the platform's far corner. If a chain means confinement, this one looks completely escapable. The mind and body have indeed slipped away, leaving only the symbolic husk of a wife, leading one to wonder if after two millennia and a subsequent marriage, Hiram Powers's Greek Slave has finally broken free from her chains only to find herself in a new psychological prison.

Ardelle Lister's 1976 film *Where's My Prince Already* describes a similar prison, but has no place for Yazon's poetics. Her bitter feminist critique is reminiscent of Martha Rosler's early videos, but lacks Rosler's resolution in its meandering narrative and it is difficult to overlook that the film comes at you more than to you—entertaining its audience, but also raising its guard.

Posted crudely on an adjacent pillar is a less confrontational, but equally entertaining series of wanted posters by Melissa Potter. "Missing Persons" mines the pages of *The New York Times* Sunday Styles section for photographs of fashionable brides, cheekily transforming their glamorous profiles into mug shots captioned with personal statistics. Whether the women are fugitives, victims, or, more likely, both, is left by Potter for us to consider.

The repetitive and nerve-scraping tune "Barbie Girl" prematurely



Jennifer Yazon, "Untitled" (2004). Courtesy of 65 Hope Street Gallery.

announces a video documenting Lebanese artist Zena el Khalil's running of the Beirut marathon in a gaudy pink dress. It becomes clear that the artist feels misled by her own idealized fantasy of marriage. Scattered around the television are hot pink party decorations that sit naively at the foot of a picturesque beachfront running up the wall. But, el Khalil's paradise is patrolled by photos of imposing, militant men, placing her Barbie bliss on the far side of a threatening reality.

Closer to home, issues of false hope shape the art of Paul Wong and Jess Dobkin in their struggle for the right to same sex marriage. In Wong's "Same Difference," we see two individuals at an altar waiting to be married. Although the "bride" is veiled, his male features are unmistakable. Sitting before the photograph is a hollow, Plexiglas wedding cake—a symbolic Xanadu whose hell bound rivers are exchanged by a rising, maybe even hopeful, spiral of burning of incense. Before leaving, we are encouraged to visit a web-based project by Jess Dobkin, indulgently celebrating her newly acquired right to same sex marriage in Canada. So, while the show concludes, the discussion is to be continued...Dobkin's appeal is offered with a chocolate coin wrapped in gold foil, leaving us with a reminder that manufactured images of marriage are no more than empty symbols, gold-plated tokens and glittering fantasies that signify a hollow and elusive reality.

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